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EARLY RAILROADS IN MICHIGAN

By Cleland B. Wyllie
Editor, University News Service

Settlers of Michigan Territory can never be accused of lacking vision. At a time when most of the area was wilderness, the pioneers established the University of Michigan, in 1817. Just 13 years later, with no great progress in the settlement of the Territory and with total population of only 30,000, Michigan began thinking about railroads.

The year 1830 is a significant one in American railroading. On January 7 of that year, the first revenue passengers were carried by the Baltimore & Ohio. This road opened for regular freight and passenger service between Baltimore and Ellicott's Mill, Maryland, on May 24, 1830. Horses were the first motive power over this 13-mile stretch of railroad.

Honors for carrying passengers with steam power belong to the South Carolina Railroad, now part of the Southern Railway System. Regular service with the locomotive, "Best Friend of Charleston," was opened over six miles of line from Charleston on Christmas Day, 1830.

With railroading in the United States so new, it is just a bit surprising that one of the earliest railroad charters in the Northwest Territory should have been issued in Michigan on July 31, 1830. This charter provided for the incorporation of the Pontiac and Detroit Railway Company. Original incorporators were John P. Helfenstein, Gideon Whittemore, William F. Moseley, William Thompson, Harvey Parke, and "other such persons as shall associate" for the purpose of making a "good and sufficient railway from Pontiac to Detroit." These promoters tried to sell 1,000 shares of stock at $100 a share, but evidently ran into insurmountable obstacles since no construction work was started, and this early charter became null and void.

Hopes for a railroad had to wait until 1832 to be revived and this time Ann Arbor figured in the activity. James Kingsley of Ann Arbor had tried to get Congress to build a canal across the lower part of Michigan in 1830, but got nowhere. So he switched to another means of transportation and brought about the incorporation of the Detroit & St. Joseph Railroad in 1832. Capitalization was optimistically set at $1,500,000 with the charter demanding that construction start within two years. This time limit proved to be too short and had to be extended.

After a meeting held in Ann Arbor in September, 1834, about $400 was on hand to help pay for the survey of a route from Detroit through Ann Arbor, Jackson, Battle Creek, and Kalamazoo, to St. Joseph where steamboat connection with Chicago would be made.

Detroit's interest in the railroad faded after an early flurry of enthusiasm, but Kingsley kept things going through public meetings and other activities in Ann Arbor. Alvin F. Harlow, in his interesting history of the New York Central, "The Road of the Century," has this to say about the importance of the role played by Ann Arbor and Kingsley in the construction of what is now the Michigan Central Division of the N. Y. C. System: "That intelligent little city may well be described as the mother of the Michigan Central Railroad and Kingsley as its father."

Despite all of Kingsley's enthusiasm, it was not until after another meeting in Ann Arbor, in December, 1835, that enough money was raised to get construction work started. A total of $9,000 was raised in Ann Arbor, $70,000 in Detroit, and $100,000 in Ypsilanti. Eastern capitalists who were promoting Ypsilanti were responsible for the surprising amount of money from that town.

When Michigan was admitted to statehood, early in 1837, the grading for the railroad had been completed from Detroit to Dearbornville. The public was a bit unhappy over the slow progress. It was then that Michigan, which in its territorial days had forbidden cities, towns, and counties to lend money to railroad companies, stepped into the picture and bonded itself for $5,000,000 to build three railroad systems across the state.

Helped by this financial "shot in the arm," work on the railroad between Ann Arbor and Detroit was speeded up. The State of Michigan acquired the charter and assets of the Detroit & St. Joseph for $116,902, plus $22,800 which had to be paid out later to settle claims against the company.

Trains were in operation from Detroit to Dearbornville by January 1, 1893. Later that month, the railhead reached Ypsilanti, but it was twenty months more before the tracks were completed to Ann Arbor. On April 28, 1849, the Michigan Central (as it had been renamed following state intervention) reached New Buffalo on Lake Michigan, a change in terminus from the original plans. Connection <u>via</u> boat was made with Chicago until 1852, when the first Michigan Central train arrived in the fast-growing town on the other side of Lake Michigan.

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Detroit's interest in the railroad faded after an early flurry of enthusiasm, but Kingsley kept things going through public meetings and other activities in Ann Arbor. Edwin F. Gardner, in his interesting history of the New York Central, "The Road of the Century," has this to say about the importance of the role played by Ann Arbor and Kingsley in the construction of what is now the Michigan Central Division of the N. Y. C. System: "Ann Arbor, little city may well be described as the mother of the Michigan Central Railroad and Kingsley as its father."

Despite all of Kingsley's enthusiasm, it was not until after another meeting in Ann Arbor, in December, 1835, that enough money was raised to get construction work started. A total of $3,000 was raised in Ann Arbor, $70,000 in Detroit, and $100,000 in Lyndhurst. Eastern capitalists who were promoting Lyndhurst were responsible for the missing amount of money from that town.

When Michigan was admitted to statehood, early in 1837, the grading for the railroad had been completed from Detroit to Dearborn-ville. The public was a bit unhappy over the slow progress. It was then that Michigan, which in its territorial days had forbidden cities, towns, and counties to lend money to railroad companies, stepped into the picture and bonded itself for $5,000,000 to build three railroad systems across the state.

Helped by this financial "shot in the arm," work on the railroad between Ann Arbor and Detroit was speeded up. The State of Michigan acquired the charter and assets of the Detroit & St. Joseph for $110,202, plus $23,000 which had to be paid but later to settle claims against the company.

Trains were in operation from Detroit to Ann Arbor by January 1, 1839. Later that month, the railroad reached Dexter, but it was twenty months more before the tracks were completed to Ann Arbor. On April 24, 1840, the Michigan Central (as it had been renamed following the government) reached Ann Arbor. Ann Arbor, Michigan, a change in routing from the original Detroit-Chicago Connection was made with Chicago until 1852, when the Michigan Central train arrived in the fast-growing town on the other side of Lake Michigan.

Meanwhile, the idea of a railroad from Detroit to Pontiac had been revived and this time construction got under way. A charter for the Detroit & Pontiac Railroad Company was issued on March 7, 1834. Sherman Stevens assumed a role similar to that played by Kingsley, and the D & P became a reality. By using horsepower instead of a locomotive, Stevens' line actually got into service ahead of the Michigan Central, since cars were in operation between Detroit and Royal Oak by the middle of November, 1837.

Latest starter in the railroad world in Michigan, the Erie & Kalamazoo, actually romped off with the honors of getting trains into operation. The E & K was chartered on April 22, 1833, by Michigan Territory to build a railroad from Port Lawrence (now Toledo) to Adrian, "to some point on the Kalamazoo River." Dr. Samuel C. Comstock of Port Lawrence was the chief promoter of this railroad, which wound up later, after the "Toledo War" of 1835, in two states. Despite the boundary problem, the road was completed to Adrian in the fall of 1836. Horses hauled the one-car and two-car trains on the E & K until early in 1837, when a Baldwin-built locomotive, the "Adrian," arrived at Toledo by boat to give the Erie & Kalamazoo a clean sweep of the "firsts" in actual construction of track and the operation of trains.

In any discussion of railroad history, it seems highly appropriate to point out one of the most misunderstood subjects regarding railroads - the land grants.

Historians must share responsibility for keeping this misunderstanding alive. Textbooks for years have shown maps with broad black stripes stretching across the country to indicate the land area given to the railroads to encourage their construction. All too infrequently no mention was made at all regarding the concessions which the government achieved and certainly few, if any, have totalled up what the government received in benefits.

To help set the record straight here are some pertinent facts about the land grants: Only 8% of the total railroad mileage in the United States was built with the aid of federal land grants. A total of 129,946,994 acres were given to the railroads, with about 94,000,000 acres granted directly to the railroads by the federal government and the remainder granted first to the states and by them transferred to the railroad companies.

Railroads were given land in alternate sections rather than the broad black spaces as indicated on the maps in history textbooks. The government retained the alternate sections not given to the railroads and frequently sold the land at prices which were twice the amount sought at the time the land grants were initiated.

And in addition to settling the land, made possible only through the building of the railroads, the government received the additional benefit of a reduction of $1,082,000,000 in the handling of government freight, passengers and mail on the land grant lines. The reduced rates were in effect from the time of the land grants until

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Congress passed the Boren Bill which repealed the land grant bill which had been adopted on Sept. 20, 1850. The Boren Bill was signed by President Truman on Dec. 12, 1945, and became effective Oct.1,1946.

Michigan was one of twelve states which received grants of land from the federal government with authority to re-grant the land to railroad companies. Approximately 10% of the state's railroad mileage (which at its peak was slightly over 10,000 miles) was built with land-grant aid.

While no one can completely gloss over the fact that the conduct of the railroads in their earliest days was far from exemplary, it is likewise true that they have been the favorite "whipping post" of the politicians and the muckraking school of writers who dominated the American scene at the turn of the century.

With the railroads sharing a good deal of the blame due to poor public relations policies, it is pertinent to point out that most of the histories dealing with railroads have been based upon public records - newspaper stories, court proceedings, accounts of spectators and similar records. Thus, railroad histories have not tended to be fully objective since the real explanation for certain actions have remained hidden in the official records of the railroads.

A relatively new organization called the Lexington Group has as its chief purpose achieving objectivity in railroad history. Membership in the Lexington Group, made up of railroad men as well as writers interested in railroad history, has climbed to 216, with Ralph C. Overton of Northwestern University as its guiding genius. The Group celebrated its 10th anniversary last April in Chicago. Much has already been accomplished in opening priceless railroad records to historians, and it is not too optimistic to hope that the work of the Lexington Group will bring out a far better-balanced history of what the railroads have meant to the United States.

Ann Arbor, Michigan
May 20, 1952

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Ann Arbor, Michigan
May 20, 1952

RAILROADS AND RAILROADING

By James B. Edmonson
Former Dean (on retirement furlough)
University School of Education

/Dean Edmonson has for many years loved railroads, as a hobby. To express his feelings toward them he offers a quotation from Freeman H. Hubbard's Railroad Avenue:/

"In the nineteenth century, when the railroad was far more important than it is today, many communities were linked only by the iron trail. At night, the gleam of an engine headlight was a star of hope, a lighthouse beacon. It told the settlers they were not alone. . . .How often did grandfather, as a boy, wait patiently at the station just to see the trains come in! That was the golden era, the boomer period, when a career on the roaring road was the pathway to adventure and independence. Farm lads plowing corn or trudging the white dusty road to district school would wave at the trains and dream of the day when they could go firin' or brakin'."

/The Association of American Railroads, Transportation Building, Washington 6, D. C., provides free publications on American railroads. From their "Quiz on Railroads and Railroading" Dean Edmonson has selected a number of excerpts to capture our attention and interest:/

With less than 6% of the world's land area and about 6% of the world's population, the United States has about 29% of the world's railway mileage. The U.S. has 692 operating railroad companies, some of them very small.

The first railroad to serve as a public conveyor of passengers and freight was the Baltimore & Ohio...on January 7, 1830.

The first train to reach Ann Arbor arrived on October 10, 1839, from Detroit. The Ann Arbor Railroad's first train arrived in Ann Arbor on June 21, 1878. About 1890, the Ahn Arbor Railroad ran trains from Ann Arbor to South Lyon.

In 1948, Michigan had 6,900 miles of railroad. (When the writer began visiting high schools for the University in 1914, most of the Michigan towns could be reached by passenger trains.) Some of these earlier railroads are now ghosts of the past.

Andrew Jackson was the first President of the United States to ride on a railroad train. This event took place on June 6, 1833.

Abraham Lincoln was an attorney for the Illinois Central and Rock Island railroads about 1850.

Harry S. Truman was, about 1901, timekeeper for a construction gang on the Santa Fe.

In the early days of railroading, trains ran only in daylight hours, and headlights were unknown.

Canada is served by two large railway systems, the privately-owned Canadian Pacific, and the government-owned Canadian National, which is the largest in North America in road mileage and miles of track operated.

The first Diesel-electric in railroad service was a switch engine of the New Jersey Central in 1925. In March, 1952, the Ann Arbor Railroad junked its last steam locomotive and the railroad is now 100% dieselized.

Chicago is the world's greatest railroad center with 22 different lines and many switching companies.

It is estimated that there are 250,000 model railroad hobbyists in the United States.

The United States has the largest number of highspeed passenger trains of any country in the world. More than 250 streamline passenger trains are now operated on American railroads. Some famous train names are: Black Diamond, Bluebird, Challenger, Eagle, El Capitan, Empire State Express, Hiawatha, Pacemaker, Flying Yankee, Rocket, Wolverine, and Zephyr. Railroads also have emblems, symbols, slogans, and nicknames, such as: Great Northern Goat, Wabash Flag, Nickle Plate, Rebel Route, Water Level Route, and Chessie the Cat.

Ann Arbor, Michigan
March 22, 1952

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NEW MEMBERS
Since the last issue

Mr. & Mrs. Edward S. Bordin, A.A.
Dr. L. Dell Henry
Mrs. Victor Josenhans
Prof. Lewis B. Kellum
Arthur Pound
Mildred Sherk
Mrs. Harry Skittenhelm, A.A.
Mrs. Florence I. Swenson
Mrs. Charles W. Wagner
Mrs. A. E. White
Mr. & Mrs. Cleland B. Wyllie
Karl F. Zeisler, Monroe

DECEASED: two Life Members: Mrs. Eleanor Gogle, Sept. 2, 1951
H. H. Seeley, April 19, 1952

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For information about Washtenaw Impressions or the Washtenaw Historical Society, address either:
Mrs. I. Wm. Groomes, Sec.-Treas., 1209 S. State, Ann Arbor, or
Miss Geneva Smithe, Ed., University Museums, Ann Arbor